

# Dead



# Birds

State Health Department Urges Calls to "Dead Bird Hotline"

ALBANY, May 16, 2002-Once again this year, New Yorkers are encouraged to help fight West Nile virus by reporting dead birds to a toll free number operated by the United States Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Service.

The "Dead Bird Hotline" number is **1-866-537-BIRD**(2473).

"Tracking the numbers of dead birds, especially dead crows, in one way we can tell if West Nile virus is circulating enough in a particular area to present a human health risk," State Health Commissioner Antonia C. Novello, M.D., M.P.H., Dr.P.H., said. "We are grateful for USDA's commitment to provide the service and we encourage people who notice dead birds to call the toll-free number and report the species of bird and specific location where it was found."

Since 1999, when West Nile virus first was identified in the United States, dozens of people in New York have become seriously ill after contracting the virus and 10 have died. The infection is transmitted by mosquitoes and can cause a range of symptoms, including encephalitis-swelling of the brain. Individuals age 50 and older are at highest risk of serious illness or death, if they are infected.

Birds, particularly crows, are most susceptible to West Nile virus. The transmission cycle begins when infected mosquitoes feed on birds, which then also become infected and transmit the virus to other, non-infected mosquitoes. When enough of the virus is present in a particular area, it poses a threat to humans. Knowing where and to what

extent infection is occurring among birds can help officials plan appropriate interventions to protect human health.

In addition to reporting dead birds, New Yorkers are encouraged to:

- Eliminate standing water and leaf debris from around your property, to reduce mosquito breeding sites;
- Install screens in windows and doors, or repair damaged screens to keep mosquitoes outside;
- Make sure roof gutters drain properly and clean gutters when they become clogged;
- Do not become complacent! Pay attention to health alerts, and take steps to protect yourself from mosquito bites when the risk of West Nile virus is highest.

For a free brochure about West Nile virus, write to Fight the Bite, Box 2000, Albany NY, 12220. Information also is available on the State Health Department website <http://www.health.state.ny.us/press/releases/2002/deadbirdhotline.htm>